Dr. Amy Nishimura
Dr. Carmen Nolte

ENGLISH 196 REPORT (FALL 2013)

1.) COURSE OVERVIEW

"English 196: Basic Composition Skills" is a developmental writing course designed to help students revise, reflect, and refine their writing skills as they practice writing in various genres. This five-credit course allows students who placed into English 22 (with a COMPASS score of 40 or higher) to earn the graduation requirement of English 100. Students enrolled in ENG 196 complete 30 pages of formal writing as well as a variety of writing exercises, including revision workshops, paragraph construction and overall organization exercises, and pre-writing strategies such as free-writing and outlining. The study of the structure of academic English and sentence-level clarity is another integral part of this course, and students consistently work on grammar and punctuation exercises over the course of the term. In order to prepare students for the academic research papers they are composing both in this and in other college courses, ENG 196 also teaches the difference between scholarly and non-scholarly sources, how to cite sources accurately, and how to avoid plagiarism. This full-immersion course relies on the writing workshop model, and drafts of all essays are discussed in small peer review groups, in brief individual conferences with the instructor, and in required meetings with a No’eau Center writing tutor. Students are also encouraged to attend Supplemental Instruction sessions, which are offered twice a week. ENG 196 asks students to do a lot of writing in and outside of class while also welcoming students’ active participation and fostering a collegial atmosphere in which students learn not only from their instructor but also from each other.

Final Grades:

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Students who failed the course did so due to low attendance and missed work; those ENG 196 (and 100) students who completed all the primary writing assignments passed with a grade of C or higher. There were, moreover, two ENG 196 students and three ENG 100 students who attended almost every offered session of Supplemental Instruction, and these students earned final grades of A- and B+ in ENG 196, and A, A, and B in ENG 100.

2.) CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS
ENG 196 essentially presents a synthesis of ENG 22 and ENG 100. For students, taking ENG 196 – rather than ENG 22 and 100 consecutively – is preferable in many ways. The work is condensed into one semester, which allows students to progress more quickly and “catch up” to their peers who placed into ENG 100, which also helps to increase students' confidence in their own abilities. Several ENG 196 students this past Fall pointed out that they initially felt defeated when learning that their COMPASS score was not high enough for them to take ENG 100, but they felt relieved when finding out that taking ENG 196 was an option and would enable them, if they worked hard, to learn the skills they were lacking in only one term. In ENG 196, students are, moreover, taught both academic writing and sentence-level clarity concurrently and by the same instructor, which allows for the different components of the writing process to be understood more thoroughly.

**READING COMPREHENSION AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS:** As first-year students often struggle to fully understand and be able to critically respond to assigned readings, especially when these readings are scholarly essays, class discussions that guide students through the readings and that facilitate understanding are imperative. ENG 196 students in the Fall 2013 semester actively participated in these discussions, both in small groups and as a whole class, and they were able to more thoroughly understand and engage with the assigned texts as a result. Discussions of readings worked best and were the most productive on days when only 10 to 15 students were present, and the smaller class size on those days also made it easier for quieter students to voice their responses as well. We consequently recommend that ENG 196 be capped at 15 rather than 20 students.

**COMMUNITY-BUILDING:** At the beginning of the Fall semester, the majority of ENG 196 students expressed their desire to get to know their classmates better and to find friends, especially since many felt overwhelmed and intimidated by their first semester at the university. The longer class times allowed for a good classroom environment and atmosphere to be established quickly, and students were thus able to develop a rapport with each other that fostered horizontal learning and active participation. Some students even began to study together in small groups before or after class times. **ENG 196 should, therefore, continue to be taught as a five-credit course and with the extended class meeting times.**

**RETENTION AND WORKLOAD:** ENG 196 students who completed the required work and were actively engaged in the course made significant progress and were largely on par with ENG 100 students by the end of the Fall semester. Students who fell behind on the work and struggled with attendance, however, had a very difficult time catching up, and eight out of twenty students failed the class because they missed too many class periods and too much of the assigned work. Not only were many students first-generation college students, but the majority was also working at least part-time while attempting to complete a full-time course load at the university. Many students struggled with the fast pace and five-credit workload of ENG 196 as a result. It would be helpful, therefore, if academic advisors did not encourage students taking ENG 196 to register full-time. Ideally, **ENG 196 students should be limited to enroll in no more than two additional courses, for a maximum workload of 12 credits.**
CONFIDENCE AND CODE-SWITCHING: At the beginning of the Fall semester, all ENG 196 students considered English one of their worst subjects and did not believe they could write well. The full-immersion model of the course, however, allowed students to practice writing in a variety of genres, from a rather informal short story to an academic research paper, and to understand that different kinds of English are appropriate for different kinds of assignments: while having a character (or the narrator even) speak Hawaiian Creole English in a short story can be effective and add layers of meaning, a college research paper requires the more formal academic English. Students thus learn about code-switching and that different contexts demand different “Englishes,” and many students pointed to the short story assignment as the one that made writing more enjoyable and that helped them feel more confident in their writing abilities. The inclusion of more informal as well as creative writing in ENG 196 also allows students to practice and work on their strengths as writers in a context that feels less intimidating than formal essay assignments, and these strengths, such as a sense of humor or the ability to empathize and connect with the reader, can often be fine-tuned and included in formal essays as well. Finally, an emphasis on different kinds of English encourages students to regard academic English as a type of new language with its own rules and mechanics that every college student has to learn (and struggle with initially) but that becomes more accessible with practice.

UNDERSTANDING THE WRITING PROCESS: ENG 196 guides students through the whole writing process, including research, pre-writing, drafting, global revisions, and proofreading. By breaking up the process of composing a research paper into mini-assignments and by including regular peer review workshops as well as required meetings with a No’eau Center writing tutor, the course helps students to approach even more formal and difficult assignments in manageable pieces. As a lot of students expressed their struggles with procrastination and time-management, the writing workshop model ENG 196 is based on encourages students to start their assignments early and to work on them consistently, allowing more time for global and sentence-level revisions.

SYNTAX AND MECHANICS: The most noticeable difference between ENG 100 and ENG 196 students seemed to be sentence clarity, as a lack of knowledge regarding grammar and syntax rules presented the biggest obstacle for ENG 196 students this Fall. Approximately two hours of class time per week were dedicated to going over sentence-level rules and exercises, and while students did enhance their overall understanding of grammar and syntax, only small improvements were initially visible in their own writing. More general proofreading techniques, such as reading a draft out loud or focusing on each individual sentence in turn to find mistakes, allowed for students’ final drafts to improve some more; though students were oftentimes not sure what exactly was wrong with a sentence, the continual revisiting of grammar rules in ENG 196 enabled students to eventually catch and fix errors in their own writing. During the second part of the term, moreover, No’eau Center writing tutors were asked to focus on sentence-level problems with ENG 196 students for at least half the time of each tutoring session, which proved helpful as well. An assessment of students’ improvement that compared a mid-semester formal essay to the final research paper showed that the area ENG 196 student essays improved the most
in was, in fact, “Syntax & Mechanics,” even though the overall scores were still slightly below those of papers written by ENG 100 students.

3.) RESOURCES

i) FALL 2013 RESOURCES:

- **No'eau Center:** Students were required to meet with a writing tutor at least once per assigned essay, for a total of five tutoring sessions over the course of the term. Students who chose to revise a graded essay were required to also meet with a tutor prior to handing in the revision. During the second part of the semester, writing tutors were asked to spend at least half the time of each session with ENG 196 students on proofreading and sentence-level errors, which helped to improve sentence clarity.

- **Supplemental Instruction:** The ENG 196 Supplemental Instruction (SI) leader Sheila Kistler attended all class meetings and held SI sessions for 40 minutes each twice a week after class meeting times. The focus of these sessions was on grammar as well as drafting and revising, and they were supplemented with an online component as Sheila developed an SI Facebook page for ENG 196 students, where they could post and comment on questions about course material. As an incentive for students to attend the sessions, which were voluntary and anonymous, Sheila received quiz and exam questions ahead of time and incorporated them into the sessions to help prepare students for upcoming examinations. Those students who regularly attended SI meetings did, overall, perform better on quizzes and exams and were better prepared for class discussions. SI also helped to make class instruction more focused and productive, as students’ individual questions and concerns were often addressed in SI sessions or in online conversations with Sheila rather than during class times. The continuation of the SI program is thus an important factor in helping developmental writing students succeed.

ii) NEEDED RESOURCES:

- **Increased No'eau Center Involvement:** Given how much ENG 196 students struggled with grammar and syntax especially, one tutoring session per assigned paper was insufficient for most students. If feasible, therefore, we suggest that small groups of ENG 196 students each be assigned a writing tutor to work with over the course of the semester. These small groups would then meet with their tutor at a specific time each week for one hour. The writing tutors would, moreover, receive a syllabus for the course as well as individual assignment sheets and thus work more closely with the ENG 196 instructor in order to prevent any potential confusion about assignment details or learning outcomes. Ideally, tutors would also be provided with a small handbook, put together by English faculty, that identifies typical problem areas (in regards to grammar and punctuation) in students’ writing and that can serve as a guide and reference for how to address these issues.
• **Continued Supplemental Instruction:** As noted above, the SI program significantly contributed to students’ success in ENG 196 in the Fall and will hopefully continue to do so in the next academic year.

• **Student Services:** The Early Intervention email from Student Services, asking faculty to identify students who face academic challenges and need additional support, is sent fairly early in the term, approximately one month after instruction begins. Since several students in ENG 196 this Fall did not have attendance issues or missed work until a bit later in the semester, we suggest that Student Services send a second intervention email towards the middle of the term, so that they can work closely with those students as well. We also recommend that there be brief class visits to ENG 196 by those working at Student Services, so that the first-year students can match faces with specific services and feel less intimidated about approaching Student Services for help and support.

• **Learning Disabilities Specialist:** Undiagnosed learning disabilities significantly hinder students’ success in ENG 196 as well as other courses and can contribute to students’ anxiety over workload and to poor attendance, which was the decisive factor regarding the high number of students (8 out of 20) failing ENG 196 in the Fall. In order for faculty and Student Services to be able to adequately support our students, it is vital to have a Learning Disabilities Specialist on campus who can diagnose students’ learning disabilities and work with faculty to facilitate students’ learning.

iii) **ALTERNATIVE RESOURCES:**

• **No’eau Center Alternative:** Should the increased involvement of the No’eau Center as suggested above not be feasible, then English faculty could offer a writing tutor training course concurrently with ENG 196. Students taking that course would learn how to become effective writing tutors (and could later work at the No’eau Center) while also participating in weekly practice sessions tutoring small groups of ENG 196 students.

• **Supplemental Instruction Alternative:** Should there not be sufficient funding for the SI program to continue in the 2014/2015 AY, then the ENG 196 instructor could offer 30 minutes of review time after each class session, for a total of one hour of review time per week. Review sessions would focus on grammar as well as drafting and revising, and attendance would be recommended but optional for students. For the instructor, the additional time spent with students could count towards office hours or as one additional credit of teaching.

4.) **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

• UHWO should continue offering ENG 196 as a one-semester, five-credit course that integrates the learning outcomes for both ENG 22 and ENG 100 and that counts toward the graduation requirement of ENG 100.
• Enrollment for the course should be capped at 15 students per class.

• Students registered for ENG 196 should be limited to taking no more than two additional courses that term, not to exceed a total of 12 credits.

• For students to succeed in ENG 196, essential university resources include: the continuation of the Supplemental Instruction program and the increased involvement of the No’eau Center (or appropriate alternatives as noted above), additional support from Student Services, and a Learning Disabilities Specialist.